# National Center on Accessible Educational Materials

# Documents

Microsoft Office products now have an accessibility checker that can be used to identify the most common accessibility issues. However, this checker is not perfect, and it should only be used as a starting point for improving the accessibility of your documents. The checker can be helpful in pointing you to the issues that need the most attention in a given document, but you still need to have an understanding of accessibility best practices to properly address those issues.

[How to Use the Office Accessibility Checker](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/video-check-the-accessibility-of-your-document-9d660cba-1fcd-45ad-a9d1-c4f4b5eb5b7d?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US)

To help you remember the best practices for document accessibility, use the mnemonic SLIDE, which stands for:

* [Styles](#_4hb4sdwnju19) are used to properly mark up headings
* [Links](#_mognpa476gd8) are unique and descriptive
* [Images](#_tcaw43i5xaye) have text alternatives
* [Design i](#_kv773qt8ju1n)s legible and perceivable
* [Empathy](#_zh44u1px5fko) Drives Design

## Styles Are Used to Mark Up Section Headings

Section headings reveal how the information is organized and make the document easier to scan. When section headings are properly marked up with styles, they also improve navigation on long documents for screen reader users.

**Best Practice:** Select the desired heading text and choose an appropriate heading style from the styles menu in your authoring tool. Make sure headings are nested in a logical order: a document should have only one level one heading (the document’s title) followed by second level headings for the sections, third level headings for the subsections and so on.

* [Mark Up Headings in Microsoft Word](https://youtu.be/zbVl4IYqmIU) (NC State)
* [Mark Up Headings in Google Docs](https://youtu.be/3cCAUcLPI0c?list=PLCRRhQ4ae_Abn1oDlhMQAE63YG7Ur-O0F) (Luis Perez)

## Links Are Descriptive and Unique

Screen reader users can use a shortcut to bring up a list of the links in a document. Links need to be unique and descriptive for them to make sense when they are accessed as a list, without the surrounding text for context.

**Best Practice:** Instead of “click here” or “learn more” select meaningful text (tex that is descriptive and unique) and make that text the link.

* [Create Descriptive Links in Microsoft Word](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/video-create-accessible-links-in-word-28305cc8-3be2-417c-a313-dc22082d1ee0?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US) (Microsoft)
* [Create Descriptive Links in Google Docs](https://youtu.be/L2GyAPqs8no?list=PLCRRhQ4ae_Abn1oDlhMQAE63YG7Ur-O0F) (Luis Perez)

## Images Include Text Alternatives

Screen readers can only describe an image to someone who is blind if a text alternative is provided. Text alternatives can also make complex images easier to understand for other learners.

**Best Practice:** After considering the purpose of the image and the context for its use, provide a concise description that focuses on the information the image conveys. If the image is only used for decoration, mark it as decorative (if your authoring tool has that option) or use “decorative” as the alternative text.

* [Adding Alternative Text in Microsoft Word for Office 365](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/video-improve-accessibility-with-alt-text-9c57ee44-bb48-40e3-aad4-7647fc1dba51?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US) (Microsoft)
* [Add Alternative Text in Microsoft Word 2016](https://youtu.be/fxC0r00rvaY) (Diablo Community College)
* [Add Alternative Text in Google Docs](https://youtu.be/d3EF1D2p-m8?list=PLCRRhQ4ae_Abn1oDlhMQAE63YG7Ur-O0F) (Luis Perez)

## Design Is Legible and Perceivable

Through good design, you can reduce the amount of effort it takes your readers to process the information in a document, allowing them to focus on the meaning conveyed by the content rather than its presentation.

**Best Practices:** To make your text legible:

* Ensure sufficient contrast between text and the background. This can be confirmed with the free [Colour Contrast Analyzer](https://developer.paciellogroup.com/resources/contrastanalyser/) tool for Mac and Windows.
* Choose a sans-serif font (one without extra ornamentation) for your body text.
* Make sure body text is no smaller than 12pt.
* Use left-alignment rather than fully-justified text. Full justification can add extra spacing between words that can be distracting to some readers.
* Limit the use of italics, as they can make text harder to read.

## Empathy Drives Design

Just as important as the specific techniques for improving document accessibility is the mindset you bring to the design and authoring of each document. As you work on your documents, think about how your choices impact on others - approach your design with empathy and ask yourself questions such as:

* Is everyone able to perceive the information? Does my content require only one means for accessing the information (e.g. seeing, hearing, etc.)?
* Is everyone able to navigate and interact with the content? Does my content require only one means for interacting with the information (e.g. mouse, keyboard, touch gestures)?
* Is everyone able to understand the content? Does my content include definitions of key terms and other language supports? Is my document written in plain language?

By approaching the design of your documents with empathy for the needs of others, you will not only produce documents that work well for a diverse audience, but you will also be “designing for your future self.” All of us require additional support as we age and our vision, hearing and motor abilities are not as sharp as they once were.